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SOME LETTERS

OF

RALPH IZARD

TO

THOMAS JEFFERSON.

CONTRIBUTED BY

WORTHINGTON C. FORD.

CHARLESTON.

WALKER, EVANS & COGSWELL CO., PRINTERS.
1901.



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LETTERS OF RALPH IZARD.

COMMUNICATED BY WORTHINGTON C. FORD, OF BOSTON.

[R. IZARD TO JEFFERSON.]

The Elms, South Carolina, 27th April 1784

Dear Sir,

I am much flattered by a very friendly letter which I received a few days ago from you. Nothing can be more pleasing than expressions of regard from those we esteem and love. You are so good as to promise me a letter now and then; be assured that I shall at all times be happy to hear from you. We have had repeated accounts of the disagreeable situation of Congress at Annapolis. That the States should be so inattentive to their interest is much to be lamented; this is a matter I never think of but with a mixture of indignation and sorrow. How can the negligence of Maryland be accounted for? Is she ignorant of the advantages to be derived from the residence of Congress? or does she suppose, as the citizens of Philadelphia foolishly and presumptuously did, that it is impossible for them to go anywhere else? At the commencement of the war I was well aware that at the end of it we should have difficulties to contend with. The inattention and even disrepect shewn to the federal government by almost every State in the Union, will be productive of the most serious and I fear fatal consequences, and was not one among the number of which I was at the time apprehensive.

You will have heard that our Legislature has passed the 5 per cent law. Considerable opposition was given to it by some of the ablest and most respectable men of the country. It was however carried by a majority of three to one; and I hope the conduct of the other States will make it unneces-

sary to repeal it till our public debt is paid. Our Legislature have likewise shewn themselves remarkably moderate towards the refugees. The confiscation and amercement laws are in a great measure done away. In this also I hope the other States will follow our example. Would to God I could say that tranquility was perfectly restored to this State. Dissensions and factions still exist, and like the Hydra, when one head is destroyed, another arises. The British have deprived us of a great deal of our property. The inconveniences arising from their conflagrations and robberies will, however, in a short time be forgotten. The animosity and hatred planted by them in the breasts of our citizens against each other, is the most serious injury they have done us. Some joined the enemy from inclination. Others, in the most difficult times, from compulsion, and believing the cause desperate and almost totally lost. Nine out of ten of those who received British protection I suppose to be of the latter description and had in the beginning shewn themselves both in council and in the field friendly to our cause. These can not, except in a few instances, forgive those who refused to bend to the power at that time existing in the State, and chose to commit their lives and property to the issue of the contest.

I entirely concur with you in opinion respecting the cession of the back lands, and spoke of it several times during the course of last winter. The expedient you mention to settle the difference with our young sister, I think a good one; but I fear she will not have wisdom enough to adopt it.

I am settled upon an agreeable spot, about 18 miles from Charles Town. A plantation long neglected, but pleasantly situated and capable of great improvement. This I am attempting; and my inclination would lead me never to enter again into public life.

[Rest on farming.]

[R. IZARD TO JEFFERSON.]

The Elms, 10th June, 1785.

Dear Sir,

I have lately received your favour of the 29th Jany and at the same time 4 volumes of the Bibliothèque Physico-Economique, for which I am much obliged to you. As soon as I received your letter of 22^d May 1784, I laid the contents of it before our Chamber of Commerce and desired their sentiments on the points you mentioned. Enclosed is a copy of their report which has already been transmitted to you. I send you likewise enclosed a copy of a paper which contains the sentiments of Mr. Hall, the collector of the customs, a very well informed merchant in Charleston on the same subject. Another copy of this paper I enclosed you in my letter of last January, which I hope got safe to your hands. It will give me great pleasure to learn that those papers were received time enough to be of service to you in your negotiations.

The backwardness which you mention of Great Britain toward America is very astonishing. It seems to be a continuation of the same bad policy which has already brought them into so much trouble, and which I think will bring them into more. If they were simply to check the extensive credit hitherto given and limit their exports to this country within moderate bounds, they would act wisely. But she is grasping at too much when she aims at the entire monopoly of the carrying trade. This has occasioned much ill will towards her in several parts of this country, particularly in New England. It is said that Great Britain has encouraged the piratical states to attack our vessels. If this could be proved, I should prefer a war against her rather than against Algiers. But it is a melancholy fact that we are not in a condition to go to war with anybody. You are of opinion that we should go to war with the Barbarians rather than become tributary to them. The latter is certainly disgrace-

ful; but how shall we avoid it without falling into greater evils? The reverses of America, under the present management, do not appear to be adequate to the discharge of the public debt. Where then shall we find resources to carry on war—a war too without a prospect of prizes to encourage adventurers. The injury that was done to the commerce of Great Britain during the late war, was not effected by the Continental frigates, but by privateers, and very few of those would be fitted out against Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers. The Emperor's proceedings must before this time be manifested respecting Holland. The navigation of the Scheldt is certainly an important object. But if there should be a war, I think there must be deeper designs than the Scheldt. That matter is of no consequence to Russia. Holland may be deserted by some of her allies who wish to see the Stadtholder sovereign of that country. The dismemberment of Poland has happened in our day, and I think it probable that there may be an active partition of that country on the death of Poniatowsky. There are many other arrangements which ambition and policy may dictate; and the war with Holland may be the mask under which the exection of them may be effected. For a valuable consideration the Czarina and the King of Prussia may even consent to make the empire hereditary in the House of Austria.

These things are at a distance from us and we can think of them and hear of their being executed without much emotion. But our own affairs trouble me a good deal. We owe a large sum of money, and we are not taking proper measures to pay it. This is neither consistent with our interest, nor our honor. Our governments tend too much to Democracy. A handier craftsman thinks an apprenticeship necessary to make him acquainted with his business. But our back countrymen are of opinion that a politician may be born such (sic) as well as a poet. I live as much as possible in the country and shall continue a member of the Legislature as long as my constituents think that I can render them

service. In no other situation will I ever be engaged in
public business. * * *

R. Izard.

[R. IZARD TO JEFFERSON.]

Charleston, 1st July 1786.

Dear Sir,

I received a few weeks ago in the city your favour of so old a date as the 26th Sept. and am glad to find that the commercial papers which I sent you had at last got to your hands. England is not disposed to enter into a treaty with us upon principles of equity and is determined to exclude us from the West Indian trade as much as possible. This is a very troublesome piece of business and the adventurers, particularly those from the northern States, have sustained and will continue to sustain considerable losses. The conduct of France with regard to her islands, unfortunately encourages the British government to persist. This appears to me impolitic, in many points, but particularly so in one. There are many well wishers to Great Britain in every State on this Continent, at all times ready to trump up imaginary causes of dissatisfaction, and to draw invidious comparisons between the past and present times. The present state of the commerce of America with the West Indies certainly cannot be added to the catalogue of advantages which she has derived from the Revolution, and I should imagine that France would find her account in not letting America feel even that disadvantage. I have considered attentively, and I think impartially, what has been said on the propriety of the mother country's enjoying the monopoly of the commerce of her colonies, as a compensation for protection, and I think the arguments plausible, but by no means conclusive. If France were to remove all restraints on this subject, G. Britain would unquestionably be compelled to follow her example.

Our western posts are not to be delivered up, and the reason given is, because in some of the States the legislatures

have thrown obstructions in the way of the recovery of debts. I am sorry that such a pretext has been given; but before the passing of the laws complained of, G. Britain did not show any disposition to give up the posts. Certain it is that if the courts of law were to be opened for the recovery of debts generally and without restrictions, and property made liable to be seized and sold by the sheriff for cash, many persons would be ruined, who have property to four times the value of their debts. The British merchants and the Tories who lost little or nothing by the war, are in possession of the greatest part of the specie in the country and would enrich themselves at the expense of the real friends of America who risked everything for her defence. This would doubtless be an evil of considerable magnitude; but in my opinion it would be better that the treaty should be fulfilled and the law take its course, than that a reproach should be cast on so many States of the Union. It is to be lamented that at the negociation of the general treaty of peace it had not been provided that no greater obstruction should be thrown in the way of the recovery of British debts *than those of the citizens of America*, instead of the words which now stand in the treaty. The reasonableness of such a proposition must have been obvious to the British negotiators and could not have been opposed. I have great doubts with regard to the utility of the posts in question. If the Spaniards had had the country ceded to them which those posts are intended to command, I believe it would be no disadvantage to the United States. But I am sorry the British should keep possession of them, and that we should be in so weak a condition as to be unable to compel them to do us justice. * *

R. Izard.

[R. IZARD TO JEFFERSON.]

Dear Sir,

Charleston, 4th April, 1787

I have lately been favoured with your letter of 18th. November, which went to New York, and from thence came

to me here by the post. You mention the Hague, and are so obliging as to wish me there: for this mark of your friendship be pleased to accept of my thanks. Had the funds of the United States allowed them to make the appointment you allude to last year, I would have accepted of it, and devoted three years of my life to their service. At present I feel much disinclined to it and most heartily wish that Mr. Madison may be elected, whenever the finances of Congress will admit of it. He is a member of the Continental Convention which is to meet in Philadelphia next month for the purpose of revising the articles of Confederation. If the powers of Congress can be so far extended as to give efficacy the decisions of that body, the measure will assuredly contribute to the security and happiness of the Continent. At present our affairs are by no means in a desirable state.

I agree with you perfectly in opinion respecting the propriety of our cultivating the closest and most intimate connexion with France. We have already derived great benefit from her, and much greater may still be expected. We are under considerable obligations to you for your exertions respecting the commerce of every part of the continent, and I am confident that very beneficial consequences will result from a continuance of them. The copy of the letter from M. de Calonne to you which you enclosed me shews the good disposition of the ministry towards us. Much remains however yet to be done; and I am happy to think that whatever extension is given to the commerce of America may, by good management be made beneficial to France. I should be very glad if their manufactoryes could supply us as well, and as cheap as those of England with the coarse articles which are absolutely necessary in this country: I mean negro cloaths, blankets and impiements of husbandry. When I was in Paris I secured from London a yard of negro cloath called there White Plains, and a broad hoe, and gave them to M. Abeille, who was a member of a society for the promotion of commerce. The cloth is near a yard wide, perfectly white,

very substantial, and comfortable wear for negros, and is from 12 to 14½ pence sterling per yard. by the piece. The broad hoes are from 17 to 18 shillings and 6 pence, a dozen, and very good blankets 4 shillings and 3 pence each. I have just copied these articles, with their prices from an invoice lately received from Mess^{rs} Mannings and Vaughan in London, for the use of my plantations : they were all remarkably good. M. Abeille told me that the manufacturers of France would soon be able to supply us with the articles I have mentioned, as good and as I wish this could be done; and if it could I am persuaded that four-fifths of the planters in this State would deal with France in preference to England.

You say that France could consume our whole crop of rice. This might easily be done if the matter were put in a proper train. It would give me much pleasure to see it, and returns made entirely in the manufactures, wines &c. of France. It is supposed that France contains 24 millions of inhabitants. If each of them were to consume two pounds of rice in a year, the amount would be 96,000 barrels of 500 lbs. which is more than our annual export of that article since the war. I have seen your letter to Mr Jay in which you mention the comparative goodness of our rice with that of Italy, and you think ours is not sent to market in as good order as theirs. In this I am persuaded you are mistaken. When I was in Italy, I visited some of the best rice plantations in that country, and was surprised to find how inferior their management of the grain was to ours after they had got it into the barn yard. You may observe how much whiter our rice is than theirs, which must be owing to that circumstance. Our rice is more broken than theirs, which is occasioned by other causes; they clean it less than we do, and their grain is thicker in proportion to its length, resembling barley, which makes it less liable to be broken by the pestle. I have seen the grocers in Paris employed in picking out the whole grains from the broken ones. This is a needless trouble as one is just as good as the other. If you have observed the

same thing, perhaps that may have led you to think that our rice was not in as good order as the Italian. I am desirous of trying how their rice would succeed in this country; and for that reason should be obliged to you if you could procure and send me any quantity of the seed from one to ten bushels. It might be easily shipped for this port from Marseilles; and the best seed should be chosen. I was in hopes that you might have been able to have induced the Portuguese to receive our rice on the same terms they did before the war. Lisbon used to take from us annually 20,000 barrels, and now there is none sent there, which is a considerable disadvantage to us. If Honfleur is made a free port, by proper management the greatest part of the rice which would otherwise be sent to Cowes, might be drawn there. It might be made a depot for all the goods of Europe consumed by America, and the ships of this country and of France, might return at once with whatever they wanted, without having the trouble of going farther up the Channel. This would be a stroke at the carrying trade of England and diminish in a considerable degree the nursery of their seamen. France would unquestionably be benefited by this. In my opinion a proper judgment of her prosperity can never be formed abstractedly; that of England must be her scale. Upon this idea my opinion was formed respecting the restrictions on our trade to the West India Islands. If they were entirely removed from those of France, England would be under the necessity of following the example, and her seamen would be diminished. Her strength and prosperity depend entirely on the number of her seamen: but France has internal resources, and a great marine is only necessary for her, because her rival is possessed of one. * * * The war bore particularly hard on this State. Most of us have been considerably injured and I have had my share of the public calamity. I find myself in debt about £8,000 sterling, with an estate which ought not to feel any inconvenience from such a sum. * * *

Ra: Izard.

[R. IZARD TO JEFFERSON.]

Charles Town 3^d April 1789.

* * * My acknowledgments to you for the very able and active part you have taken respecting the staple commodity of this country. The price of rice is considerably lower here now than it has been since the peace. One great cause of this, I suppose, must be the total loss of the Portugal market, which is now supplied from Brazil. This is a loss to us which there seems to be no hope of recovering. Dr. Turnbull, a physician of eminence in this city, resided several years at Constantinople and other parts of the Turkish dominions. I have had many conversations with him on the subject of rice, and he is of opinion that Constantinople alone might take off the whole of our crop at a better price than is obtained at present. The Barbary corsairs deter our merchants from venturing into the Mediterranean. Before the Revolution, several ships loaded with rice went from hence to Constantinople and sold their cargoes well : at present, I do not know if they would be admitted there, as we have no treaty with the Grand Seignor. The French, however, might for some time be the carriers. Will you be so good as to turn this matter in your thoughts ? It is an object of considerable magnitude, and may be of infinite service to this country.

You have without doubt had a list transmitted to you of the members of both branches of the new government. The bad weather and equinoctial winds have detained me here, but I expect to embark to-morrow for New York. Every man of common sense and common affection for America must be strongly affected by the consideration of the humiliating state into which we are plunged. The evil has arisen principally from the want of an efficient and energetic government, pervading every part of the United States. By whatever appellation therefore, gentlemen may choose to be distinguished, whether by federal or by anti-federal, I hope we

shall not be wasting time with idle discussions about amendments to the Constitution, but that we shall go to work immediately about the finances, and endeavor to extricate ourselves from our present embarrassed and disgraceful situation. * * *

R. Izard.





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